

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2017

S.R. 2017 No. 56

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Department for Communities to accompany the Statutory Rule (details above) which is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 1.2. The Statutory Rule is made under sections 132, 132A, 132B and 165(1), (4) and (5) of the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 and is subject to the confirmatory resolution procedure.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. This Order, one of a series of statutory rules relating to the annual up-rating of social security benefits provides for the rates of certain social security benefits, pensions and allowances from April 2017.

3. Background

- 3.1 In order to establish the percentage rate of the increase in benefits, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in Great Britain reviews the level of benefits in relation to the general level of prices. Where the general level is greater at the end of the period under review, benefits are increased by at least this percentage.
- 3.2 The Consumer Prices Index for the 12-month period to the end of September 2016 showed a positive growth rate of 1 per cent. Therefore, the Secretary of State has determined that those benefits specified in section 150 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 (which includes contributory, non-contributory and extra-costs disability benefits) have not maintained their value in relation to prices and will be up-rated by 1 per cent for 2017-18.
- 3.3 However, the Westminster Government announced in the Summer Budget 2015 that certain social security benefits would be frozen for four tax years up to 2019-20. It was agreed as part of the Fresh Start Agreement to make corresponding provision for Northern Ireland which was legislated for in the Welfare Reform and Work (Northern Ireland) Order 2016. Therefore, the following benefits are not being up-rated:
 - the main rates of Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit and Universal Credit; and

- the work-related activity group component of Employment and Support Allowance, the work-related activity component of Housing Benefit and the limited capability for work element of Universal Credit.
- 3.4 Section 150A(1) and (2) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 requires the Secretary of State to review and up-rate the standard minimum guarantee element of Pension Credit, the basic State Pension and widow's (apart from the initial rate) and widower's pension in Industrial Death Benefit at least in line with earnings. The Secretary of State has determined that these benefits have not maintained their value in relation to earnings as measured by annual growth in the Average Weekly Earnings statistic for the quarter ending July 2016 (annual growth of 2.4 per cent.). The Secretary of State has further determined that the basic State Pension and full rate of the new State Pension will increase by 2.5 per cent., in line with the 'triple lock' commitment (see 3.6).
- 3.5 When the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions makes an Up-rating Order under section 150, 150A or 151A of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, the Department is empowered to make a corresponding Order. The Department has no power to set different rates for Northern Ireland. This Order will make provision corresponding to provision made by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Basic State Pension

- 3.6 The statutory minimum increase to the basic State Pension is the rise in earnings (see 3.4). However, the Government has given a 'triple lock' commitment to increase the basic and new State Pension by the highest in the growth in average earnings, the growth in prices or 2.5 per cent. As both the relevant increase in prices (1.0 per cent CPI) and earnings (2.4 per cent AWE) are lower, the basic and full rate of new State Pension will increase by 2.5 per cent from April 2017.
- 3.7 The rate of the full basic pension in a Category A and Category B retirement pension (based respectively on a person's own National Insurance contributions and those of a late spouse or civil partner) will be increased from £119.30 to £122.30 a week.
- 3.8 The lower rate of Category B basic pension, payable in certain circumstances to a married person or civil partner, will be increased from £71.50 to £73.30 a week.

New State Pension

- 3.9 The full rate of new State Pension will increase by 2.5 per cent in April 2017, from £155.65 to £159.55 a week.
- 3.10 Existing awards of new State Pension as at April 2017 will be the transitional rate. This incorporates a "starting amount" based on a person's National Insurance contributions to 5 April 2016 and comprises the higher of the

calculations of their State Pension as at 6 April 2016 under the rules of both the new system and the “old” (i.e. the State Pension for people who reached State Pension age before 6 April 2016). The transitional rate is therefore not a fixed rate, and can be more or less than, or equal to, the full rate. Schedule 2 to the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 provides that transitional rates of new State Pension equal to or less than the full rate are to be increased by the percentage increase in the full rate. These amounts will therefore be increased by 2.5056 per cent – the difference between £155.65 and £159.55 as a percentage of £155.65, taking account of the rounding of the new full rate to the nearest 5p. Where the transitional rate exceeds the full rate, the excess amount – also known as the “protected payment” – will be increased in line with the increase in prices (see paragraph 3.14 below).

- 3.11 Schedules 4 and 9 to the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 provide, respectively, for the up-rating of inherited amounts and shared state pension. These are components which are derived from the additional State Pension in the old State Pension, and may be payable in certain circumstances as part of the transitional arrangements to widowed or divorced people who reach State Pension age under the new system. These amounts are up-rated by either the percentage increase in the full rate or prices, or by a combination of the two, depending on the total amount of the person’s award, excluding any increments from deferral. For example: in September 2016, Person A becomes entitled to £145 a week new State Pension at the transitional rate, plus an inherited amount of £20. The total award is £165. At up-rating 2017, £145 plus the first £10.65 of the inherited amount will be increased in line with the increase in the full rate. The balance of £9.35 inherited amount will be increased by prices. This ensures that transitional amounts are treated consistently for up-rating purposes.

Benefits that must rise at least with earnings (2.4 per cent.)

- 3.12 The standard minimum guarantee element of Pension Credit for single people will be increased from £155.60 a week to £159.35 a week. The rate for couples will be increased from £237.55 a week to £243.25 a week.
- 3.13 The higher rate of widow’s pension and the widower’s pension in Industrial Death Benefit will be increased from £119.30 a week to £122.30 a week.

Benefits that must rise at least with prices (1.0 per cent.)

- 3.14 Additional State Pension, Graduated Retirement Benefit, increments to State Pension, Attendance Allowance, Carer’s Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Industrial Injuries Benefit, Bereavement Benefits, Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance will be increased by 1.0 per cent. This also applies to transitional amounts of new State Pension above the level of the full rate, and to inherited increments of old State Pension payable to a surviving spouse or civil partner in the new State Pension.

Benefits over which the Secretary of State has discretion

- 3.15 Statutory Sick Pay, Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay, Statutory Shared Parental Pay, Support Group component of Employment and Support Allowance, Disability premiums, Carer premiums, Carer element of Universal Credit, and Limited capability for Work and Work-Related Activity component of Universal Credit will be increased by 1.0 per cent.
- 3.16 Increments to new State Pension will be treated in the same way for up-rating purposes as old State Pension increments, which is to say that they will be increased by 1.0 per cent.

4. Consultation

- 4.1. Consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee regarding this Order is not required as it forms part of the annual up-rating package.

5. Equality Impact

- 5.1. In accordance with its duty under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Department has conducted a screening exercise on proposals for these Regulations and concluded that they do not have significant implications for equality of opportunity. In light of this, the Department considered that an equality impact assessment is not necessary.

6. Regulatory Impact

- 6.1. The Order does not require a Regulatory Impact Assessment as it does not impose any costs on business, charities, social enterprises or voluntary bodies.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. The Rule makes provision corresponding to provision made by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in Great Britain. The implementation of the proposals for the up-rating of benefits is expected to increase the Department's annually managed expenditure by approximately £64 million.

8. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

- 8.1 The Department has considered section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and is satisfied the Rule—
- (a) is not incompatible with any of the Convention rights,
 - (b) is not incompatible with Community law,
 - (c) does not discriminate against a person or class of person on the ground of religious belief or political opinion, and

(d) does not modify an enactment in breach of section 7 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

9. EU Implications

9.1. Not applicable.

10. Parity or Replicatory Measure

10.1. The corresponding Great Britain Order is the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2017 and comes into force from 1st April 2017.

10.2. In line with the long-standing policy of parity in social security, the Regulations will come into operation on the same date as the corresponding Great Britain Regulations. Parity of timing and substance is an integral part of the maintenance of single systems of social security, pensions and child support provided for in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It was, therefore necessary to make the Regulations during the period of interregnum.

11. Additional Information

11.1. Not applicable